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CONCLUSION

IT will have been observed that the Chinese of Southeast Asia are, in essence, the same people over the entire area, in spite of a considerable diversity in occupation and dialect, and variation in purity of blood. There is a concentration of Yunnanese in the Shan States, but this tribe does not occur in any numbers elsewhere, and the other tribes are unequally distributed. For example, the Hokkiens and persons of mixed race of Hokkien origin form the majority community in Malaya and Indonesia, being outnumbered by the Cantonese, however, in the Malay States. In Siam the Teochius and the Hakkas are more numerous than the Hokkiens, and Hailams are also a large community. In the Philippines three-quarters of the Chinese are Hokkiens, and most of the remainder Cantonese. In Indochina the Hokkiens, though numerically seeming to yield first place to the Cantonese, are the principal Chinese merchants: indeed they were the pioneering tribe in the Nanyang and they are still, on the whole, the wealthiest.

So much may be said to illustrate the diversity of the tribal distribution of these Chinese who, but for a few exceptions (such as a tiny freak pocket of Shantung people in North Borneo) originate from the southeast corner of China—a small bit of Marco Polo's 'Mangi'. Diversity of occupation again is very pronounced among these emigrants. Hailams, for instance, tend to be pig and poultry rearers, small cultivators, and domestic servants; in Borneo the Hakkas are the most numerous community and here they are largely agriculturists. Cantonese and Hakkas supply most of the Chinese labour for tin-mines and rubber estates. Nor should we accept the naïve statement that 'all Chinese are alike' (which is but an extension of the unobservant conclusion of the European tenderfoot that 'all Chinese *look* alike'). There is a notable psychological difference between, say, the volatile, nimble-witted Cantonese and the more phlegmatic Hokkien or Teochiu; the Hailams have usually quite distinct physical characteristics from other Chinese, being more delicately made and exhibiting marked cranial differences from their brethren from the mainland. As for the Hakkas, they are in some ways a people apart, of northern origin and later immigrants than the other tribes and deriving from islands of population surrounded by Cantonese or Hokkiens in

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Sometimes they have been given a choice of activities. The Spanish, for example, wanted them as peasant agriculturists but tolerated them as traders. Similarly, in Indochina the French wanted them for opening up uncultivated lands, but, since the 'Red Lands' suitable for the cultivation of rubber and other profitable raw materials were barred to all aliens, the Chinese (although he might have been a peasant at home) refused the hard toil of the fields if he could obtain a position with a Chinese firm. In Java the Dutch found the Chinese useful as middlemen, and middlemen they became, accepting the penalty of the resentment of the Javanese that such a function entailed. The farming of the revenue was allotted to them as the highest bidders by the Spanish, the Dutch, and the British alike. Such occupations are labelled 'parasitic', but it must be remembered that they were the best methods of obtaining revenue available before the Governments felt themselves able to collect it for themselves. When they could do so, the farms were abolished. Also, it should be remembered, it was from the Chinese themselves that most of the revenue of the farms was collected. If we accept Mr Furnivall's epithet of 'parasitic' we must extend it to cover the British, Dutch, and French Governments also.

Given a large and improvident peasantry, as existed in Siam, Indonesia, Indochina, and the Philippines, there was a demand for credit with uncertain security or none at all. This credit was most naturally extended by the traders to whom they sold their produce, and it was most conveniently given in the form of goods and paid for in produce at the time of the harvest. Certainly this gave great power to the Chinese trader; the question is whether he abused it. A survey in Siam by Mr James M. Andrews (see p. 164) does not bear out the widespread belief that the Chinese are unconscionable usurers. 'The Thai farmer [says Mr Andrews], and especially his wife, is much more given to money-lending with the hope of high profits than the Chinese.' As regards alleged profiteering in the rice trade, the College of Agriculture at Los Baños in the Philippines (see p. 635) conducted a survey and found that 'the Chinese merchants are performing essential marketing services at a fairly low cost'. In Indonesia it is notorious that many Indonesian Hajis and Arabs are far greedier money-lenders than are the Chinese. In Malaya it is the chetty and the Sikh who are the money-lenders; not the Chinese. Cases in which Chinese

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figured as lenders were practically unknown.[1] The charge of 'unconscionable usury and profiteering' is, in the writer's opinion, not proved.

Professor Raymond Firth has gone into the question of Chinese middlemen in the Malayan fishing industry with considerable care. He says that in this role the Chinese performs important functions. He shoulders a great part of the market risks; he supplies considerable capital, in a liquid form, in consumer's goods, or in producer's goods; and he saves the fishermen much trouble in seeking buyers. On the other hand the same observer adds:

> The system obviously has great dangers. It gives him a monopoly, with little prospect of the fishermen reaping the advantages of the rising market, or of even getting much more than bare subsistence earnings, and it tends very often to place them firmly in his debt, with little chance of extricating themselves and building up their own capital.

Among the Malay fishermen this relationship with the Chinese is variously viewed. One group told Professor Firth that they liked it 'because they can get hold of cash easily'. In several other places, however, the fishermen complained of the low prices they received from the Chinese to whom they were bound to sell. Up to 1939 the attempt of the administration to meet the situation by encouraging co-operative Malay associations for fish-marketing had had only a moderate success.[2]

It should be added that the provision of credit on reasonable terms for productive enterprise is finally the responsibility of the Governments. Much progress has been made in some Southeast Asian countries in the establishment of landbanks, co-operative societies, &c., in the last half-century, but these advanced money only for 'productive' purposes, and in Indonesia the people have still to go to money-lenders to obtain money for wedding, funeral,

[1] A London solicitor who was for many years in Malaya, where he had a large practice, remarked to the writer on 10 February 1949, 'I have never known a money-lending Chinese.' Nor can the writer himself, who had considerable experience as a magistrate and as official assignee and liquidator of companies, recollect any such case.

The writer, on the other hand, has known Britons (of presumed respectability) lending money to Indian chetties at a minimum of 12–15 per cent., who in turn lent it to Malays, Chinese, and others at a rate of interest that can only be guessed!

[2] *Malay Fishermen: Their Peasant Economy*, pp. 14, 61.

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and other expenditure demanded by custom. Moreover, the money-lenders are willing to advance money without the security demanded by landbanks and co-operative societies.

In the matter of trade monopoly it is true that in Siam, Indo-china, Indonesia, and the Philippines the Chinese have a virtual monopoly of the rice distribution and milling trades. The Govern-ments of these countries have, to meet the popular agitation, passed legislation to restrict the Chinese share in this trade. The fact that the Chinese maintains his position in face of all this legislation and in face of competition, fair or unfair, is simply because he is so much more competent in the business. Florence Horn (see p. 634) points out that the Filipino politician who charged the Chinese with having half the retail business in their hands changed his ground completely when the reply was made that all the Filipino had to do was to open up a *tienda* on his own and put the Chinese out of business. He then said that the Chinese standard of living was deplorably low, he eats almost nothing and works day and night; therefore he subjects the Filipino to unfair com-petition! At the same time it must be admitted that the Chinese, having obtained virtual control of some trades, do their best to keep them in their hands and usually employ only their own countrymen. This is naturally galling to the native looking for an opening, but there is a sound business reason for it. They employ their own people because they are, on the whole, better at the job. No European merchant would maintain that a firm should be compelled to employ persons of inferior business capacity, thus exposing the firm to the danger of bankruptcy.

If the Governments of Southeast Asia wish to secure a greater share of the trade of their country for their nationals, they are entitled to legislate accordingly—provided, of course, that the law does not operate harshly or unjustly by depriving an alien of one source of livelihood before he has had a chance of acquiring another. (The economic effect on a country of discriminating against aliens who discharge some useful function is another matter.)

In *Fanny's First Play* Bernard Shaw pokes fun at the critics who will not give an opinion as to the merits of the play until they know 'Who wrote it?' The inference is that such a question is an irrelevance, and that the play should be judged on its own merits. But while we have, so far, attempted to consider the charges

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Chinese
Indians

APPENDIX V

INDIANS IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

THE following note is appended to facilitate comparison between the Chinese and Indians in the area.[1] 162

Ethnic Indians in Southeast Asia

			1947
Burma	1,017,825 (1931)	887,000 (1941)	700,000
Siam	..	..	100,000
Indochina	..	..	5,000
Malaya	624,000 (1931)	744,000 (1941)	600,000
British Borneo	..	..	Few
Indonesia	..	..	30,000
Philippines	..	..	Very few
			1,435,000

Possibly because of the historic relations of ancient Hindu India with Southeast Asia, the prohibition of travel overseas imposed by the Hindu Shastras has not been taken to apply to Java, Sumatra, and Ceylon. There were early Hindu settlements, too, in Malaya, but these disappeared long ago and Indian immigration into the region dates virtually from the nineteenth century. 162 167

The only country in Southeast Asia in which the Indians are more numerous than the Chinese is Burma. After India and Burma were separated in 1936 uncertainty as to their future status caused thousands of immigrants to return home to India. Indian landlords and moneylenders liquidated their Burma holdings wherever possible. In 1931 there were 1,018,000 Indians in Burma; in 1947, in spite of natural increases, their number was probably not over 900,000. They retained, however, much of their economic importance. In 1931, 200,000 of the Indians in Burma lived in the Arakan Division nearest India. Of the total 618,000 were born in India—566,000 were Hindus; 397,000 were Muslims; the remainder were Sikhs, Christians, and others. Parsees were prominent in the professions; chetties (chettiars) from South India were the leading bankers with a big hold on the peasantry; Muslims from the Madras Presidency ran restaurants; the Gujeratis and Muslim Chooliahs from Madras had a large share in the hardware trade; Hindus from Upper India were the principal jewellers. Most of the common labour was performed by Hindu Telegus or Tamils. [163]

[1] I am indebted to Mr Edwin Haward for most of the material utilized in this note. V. P.

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After Burma, the Indians in Southeast Asia are most numerous in Malaya, though here their numbers have dropped from 744,000 in 1941 to 600,000 in 1947. The great majority of them are Tamil labourers on the rubber estates, but there is also a considerable community of merchants and chetties who are the money-lenders of Malaya, lawyers, &c. The Sikhs number a few thousands and are agriculturists as well as watchmen and the like. Before the war Sikhs were more numerous in the Malayan Police than they had become by 1949. They made themselves exceedingly unpopular with the Chinese during the Japanese occupation.

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In recent times Indian public opinion has been exceedingly critical of Indian emigration to Southeast Asia in the form of unskilled labour, alleging unfair conditions. The Indian Emigration Act of 1922 was amended in 1938 to give the Government of India power to prohibit even unassisted emigration (assisted emigration was that which took the place of indentured labour) for the purpose of unskilled work. The result has been the virtual drying-up of India as a source of supply for labour, and many Indians have also returned to their homes. During the Japanese occupation casualties among Tamils were especially heavy. But now that India is independent her policy may develop on different lines—the economic pressure of population on her soil may tend to make her less critical of emigration, and as the most powerful State in the Southeast Asia area she may find it expedient to resort to something like the pre-war 'imperialism' which the party now in power in India was, during its period in the wilderness, so concerned to condemn. But the whole turn of events in Southeast Asia is bound to be profoundly affected by the success of the Communists in China, and in the attempts to oppose or to compromise with them India is bound to be a factor of the greatest importance.

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It is significant that the provision of technical instruction has not been quite so disappointing in forms of production organized on western lines and mainly under western management. Even in this branch of economic life, however, the progress has been unsatisfactory. In most tropical dependencies western enterprise does not extend far beyond primary production and offers little scope for men with technical qualifications. In the Tropical Far East it has been built up on a basis of Eurasian, Chinese or Indian subordinates, thereby obstructing the employment of natives by a barrier which they cannot easily surmount. Even the trade-crafts are largely in foreign hands; the natives encounter similar difficulties in gaining an entrance, and sometimes meet with organized opposition, as when the Chinese master carpenters in Malaya declined to employ trained Malays.[1] In European concerns the higher posts have hitherto been reserved for Europeans, so that natives had no prospect of advancement. Moreover, where technical instruction has been provided, it has often, as for some years in Java, been debarred to natives because their 'academic' curriculum was not sufficiently advanced for them to profit by it. There is a popular belief that 'natives' prefer clerical employment as an easier, softer life, but this has frequently been disproved.[2] In most dependencies the failure of earlier attempts to encourage technical instruction has led to the appointment of committees of enquiry, and their reports have shown that there was little demand for men with technical qualifications. Even in Malaya, where the vast scale of western enterprise would seem especially propitious to the growth of technical instruction, a committee, largely composed of business men, reported in 1926 that 'the number of openings for technically trained men was limited, since the principal need of the country was unskilled manual labour, which was supplied by Chinese and Indian immigrants'.[3] So recently as 1938 a Commission on Higher Education in Malaya reported that the prospects of employment did not justify the establishment of an engineering school at Raffles College, and that training for the limited number of civil engineering posts could be given elsewhere.[4]

The slow progress of technical training in subjects bearing directly on material production is the more striking by its contrast with the

[1] Mills, p. 355.
[2] See e.g. Dr Van Mook, *J. Roy. African Society*, Oct. 1943, p. 180.
[3] Mills, p. 353.
[4] *Overseas Education*, 1939–40, April, p. 146.

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progress achieved in pedagogy. Ordinarily one finds that most of those receiving vocational instruction are being trained as teachers. Often, as at least formerly in Malaya, the pay and prospects of teachers are inferior to those of a clerk,[1] and the teaching profession is the last refuge of the semi-educated unemployed. Why, then, do so many seek to be trained as teachers? One reason is obvious. The demand for men in western enterprise and in the various specialist departments of Government service is soon met. But there is a general demand for lucrative employment, and consequently for schools to qualify men for employment, and therefore an almost unlimited demand for teachers. The Government can encourage the demand for trained teachers by imposing appropriate conditions on the grant of funds to schools. In agriculture and other special lines it is obviously waste of money to train men in excess of the demand, but there is little danger of an unemployable surplus of trained teachers, because in the teaching profession the Government fixes the demand that it supplies. Not until every school receiving grants from Government is fully staffed with trained teachers can the supply be in excess of the demand.

Whether the money spent on training-schools is well spent is another question. It seems plausible to argue that men will teach more efficiently if instructed in modern principles of teaching. But, in this matter as in others, the concept of efficiency is valid only in relation to the end proposed. Modern teaching methods have evolved out of educational experience in the homogeneous society of the West, where the school and the environment co-operate and teach the children at the same time how to live and how to make a living. But in the plural society of the tropics the children have a choice between attending schools, western or vernacular, where they may learn how to make a living, and native schools that still adhere to the tradition of teaching children how to live. Where children seek education in order 'to realize its manifold advantages as soon and as cheaply as possible',[2] a trained teacher should be better able to help them to qualify for 'a decent job' in the shortest time at the least possible expense. Within these narrow limits the certificated teacher should be more 'efficient'. But, in inculcating a higher, or at least different, point of view, he is no more likely to succeed than the many generations of devoted missionaries and educational enthusiasts in the past;

[1] Mills, p. 335.
[2] *RPI* (India), 1897–1902, p. 459.

7: Furnivall G-4, 5 (no date) 1948 AL1 Southeast Asia AL1

and the man who acquires a teaching certificate merely as a condition of employment, or as a qualification for higher pay, is unlikely to recommend a different attitude to those he teaches. Moreover, in vernacular schools the great mass of the children do not remain long enough to acquire permanent literacy or even to get far beyond the alphabet. Often they attend irregularly when they are not wanted at home or in the fields. In such circumstances there is little advantage in scientific teaching, and it seems that teachers, after acquiring their certificates, tend to lapse into traditional methods of instruction; not without excuse, as their chief function is to keep the children out of mischief. In lay schools with certificated teachers, the great majority of the pupils get little if at all farther than in native religious schools such as the monastic schools of Burma, the Koran schools in Moslem lands or the bush schools under missionary auspices in Africa, while they do not enjoy the same moral background, and it may well be questioned whether, from a cultural standpoint, the lay schools are the more efficient. Thus, although the easiest way of spending money on vocational instruction is to multiply training schools for teachers, and such expenditure is less obviously wasteful than on other special types of school, it is not so easy to be certain whether the money is wisely spent, with a proportional return in social welfare or economic progress.

A further instance of the relation between economic demand and vocational education may be found in the contrast between the numbers studying medicine and law. In the dispatch of 1854 one matter thought to demand attention was the provision of special facilities for training lawyers in India. Now, not only in India but in all parts of the tropics where lawyers can find employment, they are even too numerous. Governments no longer need provide facilities for those who want to practise law, but, as with teachers, can insist on adequate qualifications. Yet it is still necessary to encourage the study of medicine. The tropics need more doctors, and generally could do with fewer lawyers. Yet there are many lawyers and few doctors. That is a characteristic feature of plural economy. Every one, European, oriental immigrant or native, who has a case, whether criminal or civil in a western court wants a lawyer trained on western lines. They all want the same kind of lawyer. Demand creates supply and the supply multiplies in excess of the demand, with the result that the lawyers employ touts to seek for clients by fostering disputes, litigation increases, and legal practice

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forsakes the honourable traditions that mitigate litigation in the West. On the other hand, each group in each community believes in its own system of medicine, and wants its own medical practitioners. There is no demand for western doctors except among Europeans or in Government service, so that natives trained in western medicine can find only a few openings with little prospect of high fees or good appointments. Naturally they prefer the Bar. Even with such unattractive prospects the supply of doctors is sometimes in excess of the demand and, as in the law, professional standards tend to deteriorate or, as in the Philippines, a considerable number of doctors and dentists are compelled to seek appointments as clerks.[1] Ordinarily, however, the training of medical students rests with the Government, which can adjust the supply to the probable demand. The tropics need doctors, but there is a demand for lawyers, and consequently there are many lawyers and few doctors.

Here then we have the key to the slow growth of vocational and technical instruction in the tropics; it is hampered by the economic environment. But that is not a complete explanation. Other factors have contributed, and among them the tendency to regard economic progress as identical with native welfare. Educational policy looks to technical instruction as an instrument of native welfare, but educational practice encourages it as an instrument of progress. In many dependencies there have been repeated enquiries into the promotion of technical instruction, but these have been conducted largely from the standpoint of employers. The committee of 1926 in Malaya, for example, said, 'We fear that it is only too true that many of the youth of this country have a genuine distaste for hard and continuous manual labour'.[2] Clearly they regarded the youth of the country as merely so much labour, and this note, less crudely expressed perhaps, dominates most of such reports in most dependencies. Yet the report just cited has exceptional significance. The committee reported that there was little scope for technical instruction. But, just at that time, men were crowding into the motor industry and picking up the requisite technical skill where they could and how they could. That was happening throughout the tropics. One of the most striking developments of recent times is the rapid spread of the petrol engine and the introduction of motor transport in the native world. Men have learned to drive cars and lorries and taxis, and to do running repairs and even more difficult work, without special schools but through some form

[1] Mills, p. 368. [2] *Ib.* p. 353.

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THE PEASANTRY OF SOUTH EAST ASIA [1]

PROFESSOR RAYMOND FIRTH, F.B.A.

000 IF it is not wholly true that the social and economic reconstruction which is so necessary in Asia today must begin with the peasant, it is certain that no programme which omits the peasant can be on firm foundations. The recent history of China is evidence enough for this. My concern, as a social anthropologist, is with the analysis and classification of social relations between people and groups of people, rather than with political or economic affairs as such, although inevitably I cannot disregard them. So my aim is to show briefly some of the most important aspects of the social organization of the South East Asian peasant communities, and of the values by which this organization works. Though the details in my paper refer mainly to Malaya and Indonesia, I think the generalizations have some value for the South East Asian region as a whole.

If the basic features of the peasant society are ignored, one can understand neither the peculiar tenacity which it still possesses in modern conditions, nor the reactions of its members to the increasing impact of external economic and political forces. The definition of a peasant is a countryman—a man engaged in rural pursuits, primarily agriculture, with a comparatively simple technology and a special interest in the land he works. In South East Asia one may extend the application of the term to cover the majority of fishermen and even village craftsmen too. They are of the same social class as the agriculturalists, and often members of the same families. As occupational groups, they may even be separable only in theory, since many a peasant farmer is also a fisherman or craftsman by turns, as his seasonal cycle or his cash-needs influence him. What R. H. Tawney has said of agriculture—that it is at once a craft, a business, and a manner of life—can be applied more widely here; the problems of all these peasants alike are partly technical, partly financial and commercial, and partly cultural and social.

It is difficult to say just what proportion of the present population of South East Asia may be classed as peasants. It would seem that in nearly every South East Asian country two-thirds or more of the total population is to be found in agricultural communities, tilling the soil. In 1930 the census of Java and Madura in Indonesia gave about 70 per cent of the male workers as dependent for their livelihood on native agricultural output, and about 75 per cent in the regions of Indonesia outside Java and Madura, while large numbers of women were engaged in home craft production. In Siam, in about 1930, almost 90 per cent of the population lived in agricultural communities, rice production providing the living of about 80 per

[1] Originally delivered at a meeting at Chatham House on 21 February 1950.

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cent of the population. Malaya, of course, is exceptional, because of the especially heavy concentration on the production of rubber and tin. According to the 1947 census of Malaya, about 34 per cent of the working population were classed as cultivators and fishermen working on their own account or as unpaid members of families. In all, I think one could reckon that rather more than 100 million people in South East Asia can be regarded as peasantry.

Throughout all this region, peasant technology is simple; skills, though traditionally well adapted to the job in hand, are of limited range. Soils, despite the richness of some of the swamps and river flood-plains, are generally of poor quality. The system of felling and burning the jungle, taking off crops for a few years, and then moving away to cultivate fresh clearings while the old ones revert to jungle, is still common in the mountain areas of Burma, Malaya, and Siam, in part of West Java, in much of Borneo, and in the outer islands of Indonesia. It is known as shifting cultivation or jungle-fallowing. Although regarded as extremely primitive, it is an economic use of land in areas of low population density, where plentiful land allows of long rotation of clearings and consequent restoration of soil fertility. But where population is dense, the system cannot provide the necessary volume of production without endangering the future soil capital, and that is one of the major problems of the area. In the more sedentary forms of agriculture, fertility is conserved with a great deal of care, by manuring, by water control, and so on. Sometimes there is very elaborate and spectacular terracing, as in parts of the Philippines or in Bali, where the native cultivator through his own efforts through generations has known how to make the best of the land with his available techniques. Yet many of these techniques are only of limited efficiency, and custom may be a barrier to improvement. For large masses of the Muslim peasantry of South East Asia, for instance, the pig, an excellent economic converter of resources, is taboo for religious reasons.

Productivity of the South East Asian peasant is apt to be low, whether considered in terms of the margins required above subsistence to give him and his family the range of goods and services they want, or by comparison with Western results. It is hard to make this last comparison significant because of the differing bases, but the following figures will give, perhaps rather superficially, some idea of the comparison. In terms of cwt. of cropping per acre, for instance, the rice crop of part of South East Asia can be compared roughly with the wheat crop of Western Europe. The figures are taken from different years, but they can be regarded as significant averages. Java at 12 cwt. of rice to the acre corresponds with France at 12 cwt. of wheat to the acre; Siam at 14 cwt. to the acre with the United Kingdom at 18 cwt. and Germany at a little less; Japan at 27 cwt. of rice per acre corresponds to Denmark with 27 cwt. of wheat per acre. Yet rice is supposed to be a crop of much higher yield. What is more significant is that productivity per acre in both Malaya and Indo-China is only 10 cwt. on the average, or only between one-third and one-half of the average in Japan.